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A SIGNBOARD  
BY W. NICHOLSON

## SIGNBOARDS

IT may be news to many readers to learn that, as there are collectors of postage stamps, old china, and other articles of *bijouterie et vertu*, so there are collectors of old signboards, and among others who have accumulated these more or less artistic memorials of the past may be mentioned Lord Harewood, Lord Houghton, and the Slingsby family, who possess signs valued at a considerable amount, which in former days swung in front of, or above, noted coaching-houses on the Great North Road, and some of which are hundreds of years old, and worth many thousands of pounds. Many of these must be veritable artistic treasures, for we know that George Morland often painted signposts and boards for a supper, while Gainsborough has also been so credited with honouring Boniface. Again, the Corporation of the City of

London possesses many unquestionably unique specimens, which are absolutely priceless, among them being the identical signboard which used to hang over 'The Old Boar's Head' in Eastcheap, where Prince Hal and Sir John Falstaff are represented by Shakespeare as holding their revels. There are many signs in existence which were painted by Hogarth, Etty, Morland, and others, and upon these very high prices have been placed, some few years back a collector paying twelve hundred guineas for a sign, which was ancient as well as curious and artistic, which had adorned an old Chester hostelry.

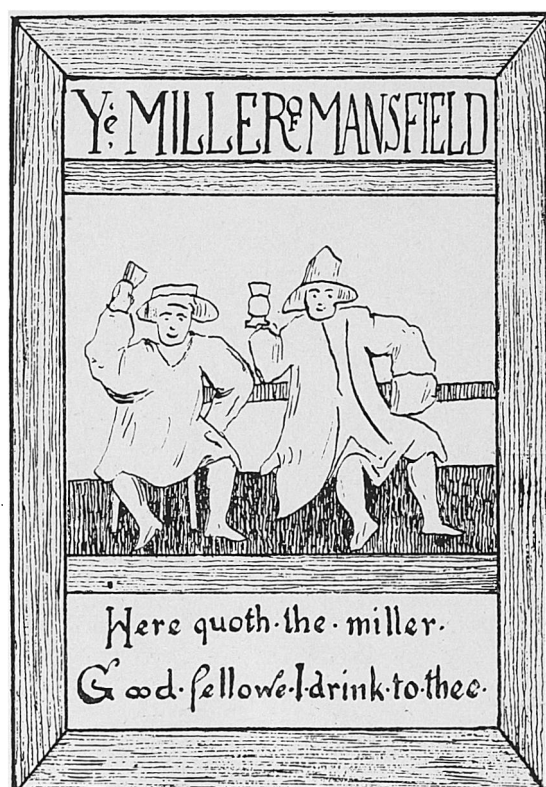
It has been said, and this with a certain degree of truth, that the very baldest and crudest of art is to be found in signs, but, on the other hand, there must be many really artistic specimens painted by men whose names have become

famous the world over. In the days when the masses were uneducated, it was necessary to appeal to them pictorially, and hence it was in those days that the sign-painter flourished, men of all trades and callings finding it necessary to make their profession known by means of signs. The first signs came to us from the Romans, who brought the fashion to Britain, and as time passed on we find, in addition to those already mentioned, that Holbein and Correggio both added to their income by the painting of signs, and on one occasion no less a sum than £500 was paid for a picture of Shakespeare to adorn a hostelry or tavern in Little Russell Street, Covent Garden. And here we may remark that in 1762 an exhibition of the Society of Sign Painters was held, when Hogarth was one of the exhibitors, which brings us to the point of these remarks.

Seeing that it is known that so many good specimens are in existence, would it not be well if, say during the coming season, an exhibition of tradesmen's signs were held at the Royal



SIGNBOARD  
AT BLEWBURY, NEAR WALLINGFORD



SIGNBOARD  
AT GORING

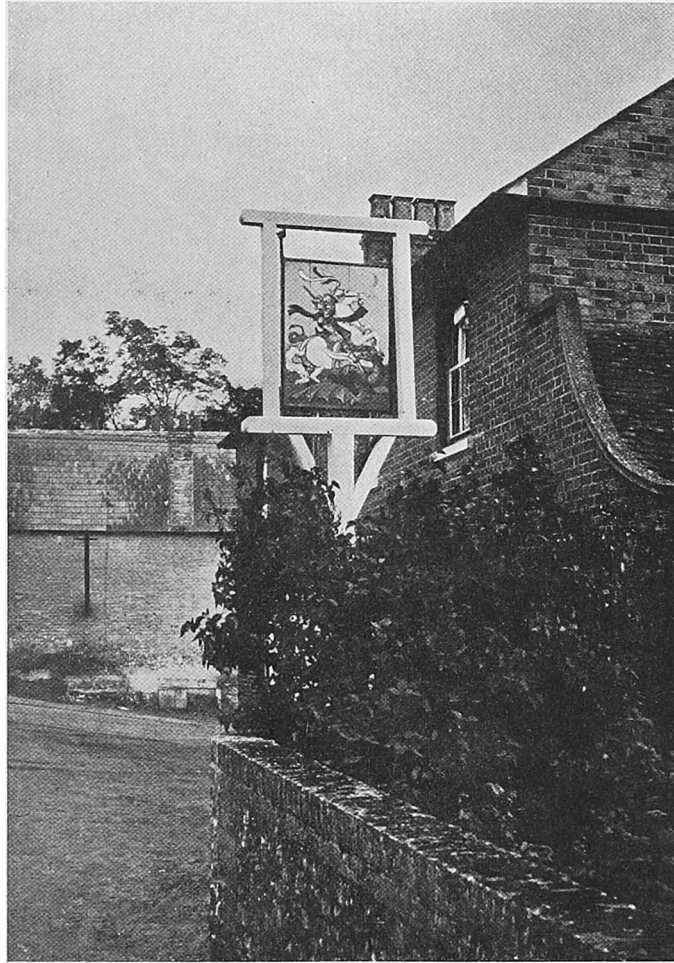
Academy or some other central resort? Such a display would prove decidedly interesting and instructive, particularly if pains were taken—as they should be—to make the collection not only representative of all trades, but of all times, from the earliest to the present day. We commend the idea to the powers that be, and hope to see it carried to fruition.

For the two photographs which we reproduce of the signboard of the 'George and Dragon' Hotel, Wargrave, Berks, the writer is indebted to Mrs. Francis T. Wyatt, the proprietress, the photographs being the work of Messrs. Marsh Brothers, of Henley-on-Thames. This signboard was painted by two R.A.'s—Mr. Leslie and the late Mr. Hodgson—probably a unique instance of sign-painting.

At Goring is to be found 'Ye Miller of Mansfield,' whose signboard is reproduced in a pen-and-ink sketch by the writer.

The last sketch is that of the 'Load of Mischief,' from the village of Blewbury, six miles from Wallingford. In Oxford Street a similar picture was to be seen in the house which is now the 'Primrose' (53) some years ago, which had

## SIGNBOARDS



THE SIGNBOARD OF THE 'GEORGE AND DRAGON,'  
WARGRAVE, BERKS  
PAINTED BY THE LATE MR. HODGSON, R.A., AND MR. LESLIE, R.A.

the credit of being the work of Hogarth, but for some years I have lost sight of it. The board from which the sketch is taken is over 70 years of age. The Oxford Street sign was the only known prototype in England, and though differing in some respects from the accompanying sketch was ostensibly the same picture. The list would be almost unlimitably extended, many

of the signs scattered up and down the country being both quaint and curious, but the four examples given are sufficient for all practical purposes, as these represent the lowest as well as the highest of signboard art. As I said at the beginning, I hope to see an exhibition of signboards held in the near future in the metropolis.

W. N. B.

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE



THE SIGNBOARD OF THE 'GEORGE AND DRAGON'  
WARGRAVE, BERKS

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE AS A SKETCHING GROUND

BETWEEN Huntingdon and St. Ives is a stretch of country which is steadily growing in favour with the artistic brotherhood. It is purely agricultural and everything seems to be as it has been for the last two hundred years or so.

Either Huntingdon or St. Ives makes a good point for entering the district. We were coming from the North so left the train at Huntingdon and drove to Houghton, four miles away, which is a very good centre.

Within a radius of a very few miles there are a number of small villages, viz., Houghton, Wyton, Hemingford Abbots, Hemingford Grey, Harford, Godmanchester, etc., they are all of them sketchable, and nearly all have fine old churches. The latter are mostly built close to the water's edge, presumably owing to the fact that the building-stone would come by water.

There are some fine subjects with these water-side churches for foreground, with their reflections